

PLUCK AND LUCK

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HAUNTED; OR, THE CURSE OF GOLD.

By H. K. SHACKLEFORD.
AND OTHER STORIES

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HAUNTED OR, THE CURSE OF GOLD

By H. K. SHACKLEFORD

CHAPTER I.—A Good Man Gone.

Dong—dong—dong! The village church bells were tolling and the mourning friends of the late Elwood Thornton were slowly escorting his mortal remains to their last resting-place, in the little village cemetery of Melrose. Everybody in Melrose had lost a friend in the good old man, and the procession that accompanied his remains to the grave was composed of sincere mourners. They spoke in low, sad tones of his many virtues and good deeds; of how the poor would miss his generous, open hand, and words of kindness tenderly spoken; of how the empty pew in the village church would seem desolate now that the kindly, gray-haired man was no longer there to fill it.

"Poor Adelaide!" murmured many a sympathetic friend, as the solemn tones of the tolling bell rang out on the soft, balmy air of that quiet Sabbath afternoon, "how she loved him!"

"How we all loved him," said many others.

"What a good man he was."

"Yes; so just in all things."

Elwood Thornton had been a really good man. He had lived out his three score years and ten without ever marrying. He had loved a radiant little maiden in the long ago when he still had his fortune to make, but a stern, ambitious father forbade her to marry him. Like a yielding flower she obeyed, though her heart crumbled to ashes under the cruel blow. Years after she bestowed her hand on another at the command of her father. The husband proved unworthy, and, after a time, abandoned her. She drooped and died—but not till she sent for Elwood Thornton. He came, and turning her eyes full upon him, she said:

"Elwood, you still love me. I have never ceased to love you. I have been a dutiful daughter, obeying a stern father at the cost of life and happiness. He has blighted my life. I would not have him thus blight the young life of my child. I bequeath her to you to love, cherish and protect in this life. I know you will never marry, so you can take care of her. She will love you even more than I have, and be a comfort to you in your old age. Will you do this for me, Elwood?"

"Yes, Adelaide, and cherish her as my own child. I will adopt her as my own."

"I knew you would—I die content. I love you, Elwood—I love you."

The young mother held to his hand till the chill of death struck her, and then gasping:

"Adelaide! Elwood!" she yielded up the ghost, and her spirit winged its way to a realm of rest.

Elwood Thornton took little Adelaide and adopted her. Years flew by, and he retired from active life in the metropolis, and settled down in Melrose to enjoy his ample fortune and devote himself to the happiness of those around him. He engaged the best teachers of every accomplishment for little Adelaide, and she grew to be his very idol—her mother's second self. She loved him as daughters seldom love a father, and seemed to have no other wish in life than to contribute to his comfort and happiness. A few years later two young nephews—sons of two brothers of his who had perished at sea, were bequeathed to his care and protection. They were cousins, Ralph and Cassius Thornton, two bright, manly lads. He was delighted with the charge and made them members of his domestic household. Ralph and Cassius grew up under the eyes of their kind uncle, went to college and graduated with great credit to themselves and to the very great delight of Elwood Thornton.

The two cousins were as unlike in disposition and moral strength as was possible for two individuals to be. Ralph was a blonde young man of high-toned principles, who was as honorable and honest as sunshine itself. His word was as good as a bond, and truth was his constant companion. He was generous to a fault, and charitable in both words and deeds. On the other hand Cassius was as dark as a Spaniard, ambitious as Napoleon and as jealous as Othello. In his selfishness he sunk every other consideration. He was greedy and grasping, avaricious and crafty, and loved self above everything else. These three were the chief mourners at the funeral of Elwood Thornton. The last sad rites were performed and the good citizens returned to their homes grief-stricken and sad.

The cousins and Adelaide Thornton returned to Beechwood Hall, now the home of mournful hearts, and remained quietly in their rooms, save when some sympathetic maiden friend of Adelaide's came in to condole with her. Sybil Heron concluded to spend the night with Adelaide, as the grim old housekeeper was no companion for her. The two maidens were almost inseparable companions, and they loved each other dearly. Ralph did not leave his room that evening, nor until long after sunrise the next day.

But not so with Cassius. He of the dark face and piercing black eyes closed not his eyes in sleep until long after the quaint old clock in the dining-room had told the hour of midnight. His busy, scheming brain was at work.

"There is a will somewhere," he muttered, in the solitude of his room, "and I must know its contents before it is publicly read. If I am not sufficiently remembered in that particular testament, I must insert a clause supplying the deficiency. It is an easy matter to do, and I would not hesitate to do it. I suspect that she comes in for the lion's share, without having a drop of the lion's blood in her veins."

When all in the house were asleep, or court-ing sleep, Cassius Thornton crept from his room and stealthily descended the stairs to the library, where his uncle had long kept his private papers, books and other things. He had a key that mysteriously fitted the door of the library. He slowly inserted it in the lock so as to avoid making the slightest click. Turning it slowly and stealthily, he pushed back the bolt, and the door opened. Entering, he closed the door and locked it.

"Now for that secretary," he muttered, as he approached the secretary on which Elwood Thornton had penned so many letters and signed so many checks. From his pocket he drew a small bunch of skeleton keys, and proceeded to unlock the various drawers of the secretary. One after another were opened, and the papers carefully examined.

"There is no will here," he muttered; "I wonder if he gave it to that lawyer for safe keeping? Uncle Elwood was a cautious, methodical man in all he did, and he may have placed it in the bank for safety. I would give half my inheritance to get hold of it for just one hour."

Again did he search through every drawer and niche of the secretary, but in vain; the precious document could not be found. With a black scowl on his face, he turned and glared around the room, as if half hoping to catch some clew to the missing paper. There was a look of baffled rage in his keen black eyes, as he once more turned to the secretary and locked it. With a bitter curse on his lips, he opened the door of the room, and softly crept away up the carpeted stairs to the solitude of his own apartment.

"I shall have to take chances with them," he muttered, as he proceeded to disrobe and retire to bed; "though I would like to get my hands on it before it was opened to the public. I know she will get the biggest slice."

The next day after the funeral of Elwood Thornton the lawyer who had managed his legal business for many years called at Beechwood Hall and sent out for several of the intimate friends and neighbors of the deceased to come in and hear the will read. Of course they came, for curiosity was on tiptoe as to what was to become of Adelaide, who, they all knew, was of no blood kin to the others. But they did know that she had been his faithful companion for nearly twenty years, and that he loved her as a father would love a beautiful and affectionate daughter. When they were all assembled in the large, old-fashioned parlor, the lawyer, with Adelaide by his side, entered the room and took seats near the old piano, at which she had so often played and sang for her benefactor.

"I am now about to read the last will and testament of Elwood Thornton, deceased," said the lawyer, rising with the document in his hand. "I hope you will listen in perfect silence and without comment until the last line is read," and with that he commenced reading.

After making many charitable bequests, and liberally rewarding all who were in his employ at the time of his death, he gave Beechwood Hall and the bulk of his fortune to his beloved adopted daughter, Adelaide Thornton. To each of his two nephews, to whom he had given a first-class education, he bequeathed the sum of twenty thousand dollars, with which to enter business and make a fortune as he had done.

"They have had a good business training," the lawyer read, "and ought to make a fortune with such a sum to start with. If they do not, they are unworthy of even this liberal bequest. Adelaide could never do business. She is not fitted for it. But, if she should die unmarried and without heirs of her body, I desire that all herein bequeathed to her shall be equally divided between the said Ralph and Cassius Thornton."

Such a will created the most profound sensation in Melrose, and the villagers wondered at it greatly. But Ralph Thornton arose to his feet, and walked boldly over to where Adelaide was sitting, took her hand in his, and said, loud enough for all in the room to hear:

"I am glad for your sake, Adelaide. You deserved it all. I congratulate you on your good fortune."

Adelaide burst into a flood of tears, during which Cassius Thornton abruptly quitted the room.

CHAPTER II.—Giles Scroggins.

"Ten thousand curses on that will!" hissed Cassius Thornton, pacing to and fro on the piazza that extended near the entire length of the noble old mansion. "A million of dollars have slipped from my grasp all because I could not put my hands on it last night. I knew she would get the lion's share, for she was so sweet with the old dotard. Curses on her for coming between me and my fortune!"

The black scowl on his swarthy face soon attracted the attention of the neighbors, and it was whispered to Adelaide. She made haste to reach his side.

"Cousin Cassius," she said, for she called them both cousins, I am sorry. You must always live at Beechwood Hall, and consider it as much your home as mine; and——"

"My respected uncle has been very liberal indeed," said he, interrupting her with a hard, ironical tone of voice. "I will accept your invitation until affairs can be settled, and then drift whithersoever fortune may send me."

The sarcastic tone wounded her sensitive heart. She thought the memory of her adopted father was insulted, and therefore, womanlike, turned away to indulge in a fresh flood of tears. Ralph took her by the hand, and led her to the door of her own apartment, where he again congratulated her on her good fortune.

"Why, I can soon be as rich as you with twenty thousand dollars to start on," he said, still re-

taining her hand in his. "But you could not. I am glad for your sake, Adelaide."

"Oh, cousin!" she sobbed, "I am so miserable! Cousin Cassius is so angry. He thinks that I—"

"Never mind what he thinks," said Ralph. "He will be ashamed of himself in the morning," and Ralph left her and rejoined the neighbors in the parlor.

Adelaide remained in her room during the rest of the day, leaving the old housekeeper to act for her as hostess, which the old lady knew well how to do. Adelaide was grieved over Cassius Thornton's remarks about the will, and felt as though she would rather surrender the legacy than have him remain dissatisfied. But Ralph told her a day or two afterwards, when she mentioned the subject to him, that his uncle's will must be obeyed strictly or it would amount to a palpable disrespect to his memory before all the world. That was enough for Adelaide Thornton. She would face the world in obeying the wishes of her benefactor after that. But Cassius Thornton suddenly changed tactics. In the solitude of his room he reasoned with himself.

"The will is a good one. It cannot be broken in court. She has the bulk of the property, is young and handsome and would make a charming wife. Why not marry her and thus feather my nest for life. I am not one to toil and plod along through life delving for a living among the sharpers of commercial life. I'll marry her and thus get a share of my own and make my position in life an assured one."

With these thoughts running in his head Cassius retired, and the next morning greeted Adelaide cheerfully at the breakfast table.

"I owe you an apology, cousin," he said, with a bland smile on his dark, handsome face, "for my hasty remarks yesterday. I did not think then of how just Uncle Elwood was in what he had done. I am glad for your sake, and will gladly remain your friend and protector."

"Oh, Cassius, you don't know how happy your words make me!" she cried, tears filling her eyes. "I was so utterly miserable I could not sleep. I hope you will always consider Beechwood Hall your home."

"Thanks, dear cousin," he said. "I have no other home. I could not love any other home but this."

Thus they began life at Beechwood Hall. Cassius was as courtly, polite and attentive to Adelaide as a prince would be to his lady love. Ralph, however, remained the same kind, gentle and affectionate cousin he had always been. She was flattered by the attentions of Cassius, but yet she loved and trusted Ralph the most. A year passed, and the old mansion became the center of attraction for all the young people of Melrose. Brilliant parties and social gatherings became the order of the day, and Adelaide Thornton was the center around which they revolved. Young men worshipped at the shrine of the young heiress, but they found no encouragement from her. She smiled on all alike. But Cassius one day discovered that both she and Ralph were deeply in love with each other, and that marriage between them was inevitable.

"By all the gods!" he hissed, "they shall not wed. He seeks to get her fortune. So do I. The best man shall win. If she dies unmarried and

without children her wealth goes to Ralph and myself. Therefore they shall not marry."

The piercing black eyes of Cassius Thornton shone with a mysterious light as he spoke. The dark face grew darker, and his hands clutched spasmodically as if crushing the life of an innocent object. One day there came to the village of Melrose a strolling Yankee showman. He was the typical Yankee, long, lank and cadaverous, with that lucre-loving look about him so characteristic of the New Englander. His face was tanned as brown as that of an old sailor, the result of long exposure to wind and weather in almost every clime. Then again, his name was a good old Puritan one—Giles Scroggins, of Squash Hollow. He was proud of his name, declaring it to be one of the buds of the Mayflower. He was a quaint character, full of humor and queer oddities. His show consisted of sleight-of-hand, and a stereopticon, or magic lantern performance, in which he never failed to give his patrons the full value of their money. To increase the interest in his entertainments, Scroggins made it a point to gather a knowledge of local events in every village he entered, transfer them to his little strips of glass by means of artists' materials he always carried with him, and exhibited them to the delighted villagers that night. These local hits generally coined money for his purse, and made him immensely popular with the small boy and his elder brother. Going to the only public house in Melrose, Scroggins deposited his pack, obtained a room by paying for it three days in advance, and asked for the landlord:

"Be you the landlord?" he asked, as the proprietor responded to his call.

"Yes, I am the proprietor of this house," he replied. "What can I do for you, sir?"

"Waal, I dunno as yer can do much," said Giles. "but I'd like to know whar I kin find the shepherd of the biggest church in this 'ere town."

"Oh, that's easy enough," said the landlord. "Are you a minister?"

"Waal, no, not much I ain't, but I'm some on the everlastin' git-up-an'-git religion, I guess."

The landlord smiled audibly and gave him the desired information. Scroggins started out on the street and made his way direct to the residence of one of the village pastors, where he made arrangements to exhibit his show for the benefit of the Sunday-school—keeping half the receipts for himself. This being done, he returned to his hotel, congratulating himself on his success with the minister.

"Nothing like soft-soaping the shepherds," he murmured gently to himself. "Good Lord, how the filthy lucre does fetch 'em! Why, that 'ere parson would scoop in the whole show ef I'd let him. But Giles Scroggins knows when to sing a psalm or cuss a nigger, he does."

CHAPTER III.—The Magic Picture.

Everything being arranged to exhibit his sleight-of-hand and magic lantern views in one of the largest churches in Melrose, Scroggins proceeded to put out several hundred flaming handbills, announcing his arrival with his un-

rivalled entertainments. Several small boys aided him in the work, and were rewarded with tickets of admission to the show. This done, he took his sketch book in hand and strolled about the village in search of points of local interest. Being a tolerably good artist, he would quickly sketch any incident on paper and afterwards paint it on a strip of glass for exhibition with his magic lantern. He spent two days about the village, picking up little incidents that would create a laughable interest in his performance. On the third day he strolled out up the river a little ways to Melrose Cliff, where the banks arose precipitously one hundred feet above the water. The south side of this cliff was thickly covered with a heavy growth of bushes.

Into this clump of bushes Giles Scroggins crept and sat down in the shade, for the purpose of sketching the view of the opposite bank. He had been there nearly an hour when he heard footsteps above him. He looked up and saw a handsome, dark-skinned man, with a black mustache, eagerly peering through the bushes as though watching for someone. Giles watched him for some time, and at last saw him dart out of the bushes and clutch a man by the throat. He sprang to his feet and was on the point of rushing up the steep side of the cliff, when he heard the assailed man cry out:

"Cassius! why murder me?"

"Die!" hissed the other. "You are in my way!" and dealing him a terrific blow, sent the victim over the cliff into the boiling waters below. Giles Scroggins glared as one petrified with amazement. He heard the tremendous splash in the water, and the next instant the murderer turned on his heel and walked rapidly away.

"By gum!" gasped Scroggins, "that's an out-an'-out murder! The first I ever saw! Right before my eyes, too! Won't do to say anything about it. 'cause I'm only a travelin' showman, an' they'd lock me up for a year as a witness. Oh, no, I ain't no witness in this case. But I'm blest if I don't take the picter, anyhow," and taking his pencil he rapidly sketched the scene as it was so vividly impressed on his mind.

This done, he crept away, and made for the village as quick as he could. The first man he met on reaching the hotel was the man who had thrown the victim over the cliff. He seemed as cheerful and unconcerned as if he had never harmed a fly. Giles could not help gazing at him in utter amazement.

"Here, Mr. Scroggins!" called the landlord, and Giles turned away to see what he wanted. "All the boys and girls in town are going to your show to-morrow night."

"Ain't the old uns comin', too?" the Yankee asked. "It 'ud do 'em good to see the youngsters laugh."

"Well, I guess they'll all be there, too," said the landlord. "I heard Mr. Cassius Thornton, the dark, handsome gentleman talking to the old man over there say that that he and all his friends were going just for the fun of the thing."

"Glad to hear it," said Giles. "I'll make 'em feel good. I'm a rustler, I am, and can put up the best one-horse show in America. Who is Mr. Cassius Thornton, an' how many friends has he got?"

"He is one of our most popular young men," replied the landlord. "His uncle died a year ago and left him and his Cousin Ralph \$20,000 each, and——"

"Phew!" whistled Giles, "that's a big pile. Who'll they leave it to, I wonder?"

"The survivor takes it, I guess," answered the landlord.

Giles nodded his head, but said nothing.

"He left an adopted daughter, though, nearly a half million," continued the landlord, in a gossip sort of way, "and it's even chances with 'em which one shall marry her."

"Do tell!" exclaimed Giles, with a sudden interest. "I'm betting that the worst man wins her. It's the luck of the critters."

"Well, as they are both good fellows, it would be hard to decide a bet like that," said the landlord; and at that moment someone called him away, and Giles went up to his room to paint on glass some of the sketches he had put on paper.

"He'll be there, eh?" he muttered to himself, as he climbed the stairs. "Waal, I'll make 'im sick. I'll give 'im somethin' that'll haunt him all his life, or my name ain't Giles Scroggins, of Squash Hollow."

The showman then took his materials and busied himself until a late hour preparing his pictures of local hits. At last he finished them, and he prepared to give an exhibition on the following night. When the doors of the lecture-room of the church were thrown open there were hundreds of people—old and young, waiting there for the purpose of entering on tickets they had purchased from the Sunday-school committee. The house was soon filled to overflowing, and Giles was correspondingly happy. Being a Sunday-school entertainment, the majority of views were Biblical, historical and local. The views of the points of interest in Palestine were deeply interesting; but the local hits set them all in a roar. Nearly every well-known locality in and about Melrose was shown, including the homes of many in the audience.

Suddenly Melrose Cliff came into view. Hundreds of young lovers had passed many hours of bliss in each other's company there, and therefore gazed admiringly on the beautiful picture. Soon a man crept into the bushes in the picture and half concealed himself. Cassius Thornton half arose to his feet as he gazed at the scene. But no one noticed him. Every eye was on the picture. Suddenly another figure appeared, and the first one sprang out upon him, dagger in hand. There was a brief struggle, and then the victim was hurled over the cliff into the waters of the river.

"Die!" hissed a voice, apparently coming from the roof of the church. "You are in my way!"

"Ugh—ah!" gasped Cassius Thornton, pale as death, reeling and clutching wildly at space, and the next moment he sank down between the seats in a death-like swoon.

CHAPTER IV.—The Schemer's Resolve.

The sudden fainting of Cassius Thornton at the Sunday-school festival created the most intense excitement among the audience. There

was a broad grin on the face of Giles Scroggins, though everyone else were either excited or deeply sympathetic.

"Ha, ha, ha!" he chuckled to himself. "That'll spile his sleep for 'im, the cantankerous cuss. I ain't never goin' to let up on 'im. I'll make 'im sick ef I can't hang 'im."

Cassius was carried into the library-room of the church, and in a few minutes he was able to sit up and converse with those around him.

"How do you feel now, Mr. Thornton?" the parson asked, leaning over and placing a hand affectionately on his shoulder.

"Better, thank you—much better," he replied, holding his head between his hands; "but I feel queer about my head. I don't know what to make of it. It must have been a rush of blood. Please send a carriage, and let me go home now. I think a bath would do me good."

In another minute a half dozen carriages were placed at his disposal. He accepted one, and was carried home by two young friends. The presence of the two young men assisting him into the house created a little breeze of excitement among the servants. Adelaide, pale and self-possessed, met them at the door with the sharp, pointed question:

"What has happened, Cassius?"

"I—I am ill!" he stammered.

That was enough. She quickly gave orders to the servants. One ran for a physician, another prepared his room, and another assisted in carrying him to it.

"Please explain this to me, Mr. Allen," said Adelaide to one of the gentlemen who accompanied him home.

"That is a hard thing to do, Miss Thornton," replied Allen. "He suddenly gave a gasp and then swooned away like a dead man."

"Then he must be very ill. I have sent for Doctor Pillsbury; he will be here soon."

The physician came and made a critical examination. He could not detect any real cause for the sudden swooning, nor could he see to what extent the patient's nerves had been excited. Prescribing an opiate, he went away as much puzzled as the rest of the good people of Melrose.

"I will feel better now if I can only get a little sleep," said Cassius to those about him.

They left him alone in his room, and went below to the parlors.

"Ten thousand devils!" hissed Cassius, as soon as they were gone. "I came near giving myself away; that infernal mountebank could not have reproduced that affair more accurately had he been there to photograph it. Yet I am satisfied he knows nothing about it—can't know it, for no one was there. Yet there he had it as plain as daylight. Oh, Lord, I thought I would sink through the earth. I must see him and buy that view from him and destroy it."

So great was his annoyance that he could not sit nor stand still for a moment. He paced the room like a caged tiger.

"Yes, I must get that view from that fellow Scroggins. He is a low, sordid fellow, and will do anything for money. Lord, what a shock he gave me! Does he know anything? If I thought he did, I'd——"

Here the flashing black eyes, compressed lips and desperate clutching of the right hand indi-

cated another tragedy in which the strolling Giles Scroggins was to be a victim. By and by the opiate he had taken began to take effect. He felt drowsy, and lay down on the bed and closed his eyes. But he had not been dozing more than ten minutes ere his disordered brain conjured up the pale, reproachful face of Ralph Thornton before him. He gave an unearthly yell and sprang to his feet, glaring around the room like a wild man.

"Perdition seize that Yankee humbug!" he growled. "I am all unstrung by his infernal picture. I can't close my eyes without seeing it."

A knocking on his room door caused him to wheel and ask:

"Who's there?"

"Did you call any one, sir?" a servant asked.

"No, I didn't."

The servant went away, and Cassius Thornton once more retired to bed, almost overcome by the powerful opiate he had taken, and was soon wrapped in profound slumber from which he did not awake until quite late the next day. When he did awake he found several friends in the parlor waiting to hear from him. His heart almost sank like a lump of lead in his bosom, fearing that suspicion had fastened its poisoned fangs upon him. But his fears were groundless. They were friends come to learn of his health. He soon quieted their fears and they went away, leaving him alone with his thoughts.

After dinner Cassius Thornton left Beechwood Hall and went out into the village. He met Ernest Allen, who took him by the hand and asked:

"How do you feel now, old fellow?"

"Oh, I feel all right except a little heavy about the head," he replied.

"Well, you gave them a first-class fright," said Allen, laughing good-naturedly.

"Yes, I suppose so, but it was unintentional, I assure you."

"Of course it was. Everybody knows that. But what has become of Ralph?"

Cassius started as if stung, but recovered in a moment.

"I am sure I don't know," he said. "He said something about going over to the city the day before yesterday, and I guess he is over there yet."

"Yes—New York is a gay place for a man with plenty of money," and Ernest gave a low, expressive laugh which meant a great deal without conveying anything.

"You are right there," remarked Cassius. "I am strongly tempted to go over and put up there for a month or so. By the way, Allen, what has become of that queer Yankee humbug who was amusing the Sunday-school children so much last night?"

"I heard some of the boys say he would give another entertainment to-night up at the landing on the river, where so many workingmen's families reside. He is a queer character, isn't he?"

"Decidedly. I was both amused and interested in him last night; I would like to see him again."

"So would I," assented Allen. "He is a comical chap; I would like to know his history."

"Yes—it would be interesting, I guess," and Cassius Thornton excused himself and turned to retrace his footsteps back to Beechwood Hall.

In his room he opened a drawer and took there-

from a revolver and a dagger, concealing them about his person.

"He will not stop at the landing to-night," he muttered. "He must come back to Melrose. I will meet him at the branch and see what he knows. If he knows anything of—of—well, he and death must keep the secret between them," and with a black scowl on his dark, handsome face, he strolled out of the house again.

CHAPTER V.—The Jolly Yankee Showman.

Night came on dark and cloudy, as though rain was going to pour down in a deluge. But the rain came not, though the air became damp and heavy. Giles Scroggins, the imperturbable Yankee showman, by placing the admission to his show at five and ten cents, had the old shop in which he exhibited crowded with brawny workmen and their families, eager to enjoy this little ray of sunshine that had flashed across the somber sky of their existence. They laughed and hurrahed over the comicalities of the showman's local hits. Scroggins had strolled about the landing during the day and picked up several good subjects for illustration that night. Among others he had heard of a case which occurred that very morning, in which a stout Irishwoman had taken a broomstick and put her landlord to flight when he became too pressing about his rent. That night he reproduced an exact picture of the house and the buxom widow, with the terrified landlord flying before her with her broomstick in close proximity to his head.

"A new way to pay rent!" sung out Scroggins, as the picture flashed into view on the sheet.

The audience instantly recognized the parties, and caught the spirit of it. They arose to their feet and cheered themselves hoarse. The Widow McCarthy was there, and was utterly thunderstruck at the notoriety she had thus suddenly acquired.

"The Howly Vargin betune us an' harrum!" she ejaculated, gazing at the picture of herself and her landlord on the sheet.

"Hurrah for the widow!" yelled some one in the audience, and the five hundred throats of old and young yelled with tremendous earnestness.

Next came old Dame Hallahan's fight with her pig, which tried to get his snout into her pot of broth, followed by that of two young lovers, a youth and maiden of the landing, whom the artist showman had sketched as they were unconsciously courting down by the river bank that day. The good-natured audience yelled and called out:

"Kiss her, Mike!"

"Hug her, boy!"

"Squeeze her!"

By means of his sliding-glass Scroggins made all his pictures move as though endowed with life. Young Mike was therefore made to hug and kiss the pretty figure by his side, to the intense edification of the audience. Suddenly the maiden in the picture sprang up and fled, leaving Mike alone. But in another instant, he, too, took to his heels, followed by an irate dame with a strap in one hand and a black frown on her face. That was too much for Mike. He had been hugging

and kissing his girl that very day, but he had not been chased by any old woman with a strap.

"By the howly Saint Pathrick!" he exclaimed, springing upon his seat and shaking his fist at the showman. "I can lick all the ould dart off'n the sucker!"

"Sit down!" cried a voice, "or the ould woman will ketch ye!"

Good humor being thus restored, the entertainment went on. Pretty soon the picture of a man casting another over the cliff at Melrose came forth.

"A good way to cast down a rival!" cried Scroggins, at his post.

The audience was silent. They recognized the cliff and its surroundings, but did not comprehend the import of the tragedy enacted there. A few thought they could recognize the features of Cassius Thornton in the face of one of the struggling men, but they made no remark. At last Scroggins gave a few humorous views in order to wind up, and then dismissed his audience, well pleased with the result of the entertainment. The audience quietly dispersed to their several homes, and the Yankee showman was about to turn down the last light when a man stepped up and laid a hand on his arm.

It proved to be Cassius Thornton, and after a few minutes' conversation with the showman Cassius asked him to sell him the picture of the tragedy on the bluff. A bargain was struck and the picture passed to Cassius. The showman suspected what he wanted it for, and he immediately accused Cassius as being one of the principles in the affair. As the showman was returning to his hotel that night he was attacked by a highwayman in the person of Cassius. Then followed a struggle in which Cassius thought he had done for the showman after he left him with a supposed fatal wound. But to his chagrin the first news he picked up the next day was to the effect that the showman would exhibit at the Dutch Reform Church that night. It was a handbill which a servant brought to him.

CHAPTER VI.—The Yankee and the Villain.

Cassius Thornton stared at the handbill and turned pale.

"Who gave you that?" he suddenly asked.

"Little Benny Stevens, sir," replied Dick. "He said he had a free ticket for carrying them around."

"You—didn't—see—him yourself, did you?"

"See who, sir—Bennie Stevens?"

"No, that Yankee humbug."

"Oh, no, sir. But Benny said he was up at the hotel giving out handbills and tickets to the boys. But what's the matter with you, sir? You look ill."

"I am quite unwell. Give me a glass of that old brandy in that closet there."

Dick poured him a half glass of the brandy and handed it to him.

"Fill it," he hoarsely whispered, and the man filled it to the brim.

He drank it off without moving a muscle, and heaved a sigh as he set it down.

"You may go now," he said, waving his hand to Dick. "I will ring when I want you."

Dick retired, and Cassius sprang up and bolted the door.

"By all the demons of the infernal regions!" he hissed with fierce earnestness, "the fellow has escaped me! How did he do it? Was it somebody else I struck? But no. No dead man has been found. I certainly stuck that dagger to the hilt in something or somebody. Who was it? Does he know me as the one who did it? I cannot stand this suspense. That fellow must be made away with. I can never live in security till I know that he is under the sod. He will haunt me to my grave with the doubt and fears he has created; I'll go out and see what I can learn, though this blasted eye pains me awfully."

The showman had struck him in the eye in their struggle.

So saying, he put on his walking suit and strolled out of the house, wending his way towards the village hotel, where he would probably meet or see the Yankee who had so mysteriously slipped from his death-blow. On the way he met several friends who greeted him cordially.

"There's fun at the old Dutch Reformed Church to-night, Cassius," remarked a young man, who had been one of his boon companions for years.

"What kind of fun?"

"Oh, that comical Yankee will give another exhibition to-night," replied the young man, "and has given out that he has some more local hits for Melrose to laugh at. Everybody and his wife is going."

"Well, if that's the case I shall have to be there, too," said Cassius, "though I don't think the old humbug is worth listening to."

"Where is Ralph? Hasn't he got back yet?"

"No; he will probably be back to-morrow."

By a desperate effort he appeared perfectly calm in answering the question as to the whereabouts of his cousin. He expected every day to hear of his dead body being found floating in the river, and was schooling himself to meet the crisis when it should come. That night he was irresistibly drawn to the exhibition at the old Dutch Reformed Church. The house was crowded. The quaint comicalities of Scroggins kept the audience in a good humor. Cassius watched everything with an eagle eye, and at last passed through the excruciating agony of witnessing the tragedy on the cliff again—the very picture he had bought from Scroggins the night before. Great drops of perspiration collected on his forehead as he gazed at the representation, but he said not a word, and no one noticed him, as every one was interested in the scene, believing the tragedy was located on the cliff by the fancy of Scroggins, merely to create a passing interest in his exhibition. From the cliff the exhibitor passed on to other minor items of local interest, and Cassius brushed the beads of cold perspiration from his forehead and began to feel easy again. When suddenly a picture came into view that sent a thrill of horror through his entire frame. It was a night scene; the locality was the little branch where it crossed the road between Melrose and the landing. Everyone in the audience was struck by the faithfulness of the picture, readily recognizing the spot. Soon a crouching figure is seen creeping through the

bushes, watching like an Italian bandit the road towards the landing. A man comes along the road with a pack on his back. Everybody in the audience recognizes the tall, angular Giles Scroggins in the picture, and greets him with cheers and witty remarks. He trudges along till he arrives opposite the crouching figure in the bushes. Suddenly the figure springs forward and drives a dagger to the hilt in the pack on his back, whereupon the Yankee wheels and deals him a blow on the side of the head with his clenched fist that stretches him on the ground.

"Whoop!" yelled a boy in the audience. "Good for you, Giles!"

"Kick him!" cried another.

"Sit down on him!" and numerous other suggestions, to all of which the exhibitor paid no attention, but went on with his regular programme to which he adhered faithfully to the end.

Cassius sat like one paralyzed. He breathed hard, and there was a fierce light in his eyes that boded no good to the daring Yankee who had thus tortured him for nearly an hour. When the show was over with Giles Scroggins returned to the hotel with his pack and retired to his room. Early the next morning Cassius Thornton met him at the hotel. Their eyes met, and Giles greeted him cheerily with:

"Good morning, Mr. Thornton. I saw you at the show last night."

"Yes," replied Cassius, "I was there, and saw the picture I had bought from you the night before."

"Oh, I guess not," said Giles, "yer broke it, yer know."

"So I did, yet I saw it again last night."

"No—you saw one very much like it. I painted another one."

"The devil you did! By what right do you sell a gentleman a picture and then exhibit it again?"

"Waal, now, I didn't go for ter sell my right not ter paint any more pictures when I sold yer that one, did I?"

The volubility and negative character of the question puzzled Cassius for a moment, and he answered:

"I bought the picture. It is mine. You have no right to use it again."

"I didn't use it. I painted another one just like it," replied Giles, with the greatest innocence imaginable, although he kept his eye on the young man all the time.

Cassius looked him straight in the face, and Giles returned his gaze with unflinching steadiness.

"You don't want the picter," said Giles, after a pause; "you broke the other one. What do you care for it?"

Was that a question to draw him out and confirm a suspicion? The thought that it was flashed through Cassius' brain, and he quickly asked:

"Where did you get the picture at first?"

"I painted it."

"But the idea—the—ah—the thing, you know?"

"The idea of the murder on the cliff?" Giles asked, and then continued: "Oh, that was a fancy of mine. I knew that everybody in Melrose knew the familiar locality, and saw that it was a good place for a jealous rival to make away with another fellow, and thinking that perhaps such things had happened there, I painted it."

Cassius panted for breath. His eyes brightened, and he breathed as though a heavy burden had just been thrown off his mind.

"Is—that—true?" he asked, in a husky tone of voice.

"Oh, yes. I humbug 'em all, yer know. All shows are humbugs."

"But—that—ah—the fight—in the road—was that a humbug, too?"

As he asked the question, Cassius looked him straight in the eye.

"Waal," replied Giles, nonchalantly. "Some chap run agin me last night an' stuck a knife into my back. I give him a sockdolager on the jaw an' he keeled over in the road. Here's his dagger," and as he spoke, the Yankee drew the dagger from a pocket and held it up to view.

"Some fellow was after you, I should think," remarked Cassius, as he looked carelessly up at the weapon he had thus parted with forever.

"I should say so, but I gave him a good one on the jaw. I'd loike to give him this knife back, as I ain't got any use for it. Don't you think I made a good picter of the thing, eh?"

"Yes—very good. Where are you going from here?"

"Up the river," was the vague reply, and Cassius dared not insist upon a more definite answer.

CHAPTER VII.—The Futile Search.

When Cassius Thornton left Giles Scroggins at the village hotel, the latter gazed after him with a triumphant sneer on his sunburnt face.

"You are more troubled now than ever, my fine fellow," he muttered to himself. "for you are now in doubt, and that doubt will hang about your neck like a millstone. I dare not accuse you, for I have no other witness, and my testimony alone would not stand against yours in Melrose. But the doubt in your mind will haunt you into your grave, or I'm not Giles Scroggins, of Squash Hollow."

"If he will go away and never come back," Cassius muttered, "I would feel happier. But he may be up to a black-mailing scheme. He euchered me out of that fifty dollars like a regular professional sharper. If he didn't know anything about the affair, how did he manage to repeat my very words? The foul fiend take it, I don't know what to think of it. If he knows anything, he is keeping it back for some sinister purpose. I will watch and see what his game is, and then put him out of the way."

The dark handsome face grew darker as this dark resolve was uttered on the way back towards Beechwood Hall. It was now nearly a week since the disappearance of Ralph Thornton from Melrose. The mistress and all the servants of Beechwood Hall began to be uneasy, for never before had he remained away from home so long without letting them know where he was. Many friends sent to inquire for him, and the same answer was given to all—that they did not know where he was, and that his continued absence was a mystery to them. At last Adel-

aide could stand it no longer. She sent for Cassius.

"Cousin," she said, "what in the world has become of Ralph?"

"Indeed, I don't know, Adelaide," he replied. "He told me he was going to run down to the city, and that is the last I have seen of him. I am getting uneasy about him myself."

"I wish you would go down to the city and see if you can find him," she said, her pretty face as white as a sheet. "I am uneasy about him. If you can't find him give a description of him to the police and offer a reward for information about him."

"I will—I will go down to-morrow," he said. "There have been so many mysterious disappearances of late that I am very much troubled about him."

That remark was a terrible one for Adelaide to hear, for her suspense was hard to bear before, but then her fortitude gave way and she burst into a flood of tears.

"Cousin—my dear cousin!" exclaimed Cassius, throwing his arm around her and leading her to a seat. "Don't give way to your fears so. You distress yourself too much. Wait until I go down to the city and see what I can find out. He may be so very busy as to forget that we may be uneasy about him."

"Oh, Cousin Cassius!" she sobbed, laying her head on his shoulder, "if anything should happen to Ralph I would never get over it!"

"I am sure no harm has come to him, cousin," he said, after a pause. "I will go to the uttermost parts of the earth to find him if it would make you any happier. Both of us would do anything to please you, cousin."

"I know you would. I am blessed in having two such friends. Had I better not go down to the city with you to-morrow?"

"If it will relieve your anxiety in the least, you had better go," he said, quite anxious to have her near him that he might continue to show her the attentions that would ultimately make an impression on her mind.

"Then I will go."

And on the following morning she accompanied him to New York, where, in a close carriage, they called on all the acquaintances they had in the city. None of them had seen or heard of Ralph since his disappearance from Melrose. They then went to the chief of police, and gave that official an accurate description of Ralph. That officer promised to have the city thoroughly scoured from one end to the other, and communicate with them at Melrose. Adelaide went back with a heavy heart, though Cassius devoted himself to the task of directing her mind from its terrible forebodings. He succeeded, in a measure, and at supper she conversed quite pleasantly with him and the housekeeper. He sat up with her till a late hour, and then retired to his room. The first thing that greeted him was a life-like scene of the tragedy on Melrose Cliff pictured on the wall. The victim gave a shriek as he went over the cliff, and then the picture vanished—total darkness followed, leaving the horrified villain standing in the doorway with every hair on end and eyes protruding.

CHAPTER VIII.—Nemo.

For a few moments Cassius stood rooted to the spot, unable to either move or speak. The vision had vanished from the wall, but it was still vividly emblazoned on his mental vision. Total darkness enveloped him, and an undefined fear took possession of him. He fled, bounding down the broad staircase, taking a half dozen steps at a bound, and rushing out onto the lawn in front of the house. Suddenly the absurdity of his fear appeared to his mind, and he halted.

"Ha—I—was shocked—I—am quite nervous—ha—ha—I am not well!"

He looked about him as if he preferred, for a while at least, to remain outdoors where the cool night air could fan his fevered brow. The silent stars above him seemed to twinkle knowingly, as if chiding him for his foolish fears, and in a few minutes his natural courage returned to him.

"I never dreamed I could be so nervous," he muttered, going back into the house and making his way upstairs to his room. "Why should I be so? The dead can never hurt any one. He is out of the way forever, and his inheritance will be mine. She shall be mine, and then Beechwood Hall and untold wealth will be at my command."

He entered his room and lit the gas. His first glance was at the snowy wall on which the haunting scene had been seen. But it was as smooth and white as the driven snow—not a speck or spot remained thereon. He retired, but not to sleep, for the memory of his sudden fright was one that would not down at his bidding. Even when he closed his eyes and patiently courted sleep, the sad, accusing face of his Cousin Ralph arose before him. But he was no longer frightened at that. He was of a philosophic frame of mind, and knew that he must expect such things for a while.

When near daylight he finally dropped asleep, it was a very fitful slumber, for he groaned and started several times; and it was quite late in the day when he awoke. He breakfasted alone. His tired, weary expression caused Adelaide Thornton to remark to him on the balcony:

"You look all out of humor this morning, cousin. What is the matter?"

He expected the question and replied:

"I have spent a sleepless night, cousin. I could not help thinking of Ralph, and wondering what had befallen him."

She instantly burst into tears and sobbed as if her heart would break.

"Oh, don't you give up, too," she sobbed, "or I shall die! You must sustain me in this awful suspense; I can't bear it much longer."

"My dear cousin," he said, taking her hand in his and leading her to a seat, "I never despair when there is a glimmer of hope. Until I see Ralph dead before me I shall always believe him still alive. I shall not mourn for him till I know he is dead. Come, dry your tears and look continuously at the bright side of things."

"How can I when everything looks so dark?" she asked.

"Have you no trust in God? Have you no faith in Ralph? that he will come back and——"

"It is because I have so much faith in him that I am now so full of despair," she said, quickly interrupting him. "Because I know that were he alive and able to write or send to me, he would do so immediately."

"Still there could arise a thousand contingencies to interfere. He may have written to either of us and we fail to receive the letter."

"Yes; but that could hardly be the case, the mails are so regular."

"But the miscarriage of letters is a daily occurrence, you know," he replied. "Have hope—don't meet trouble—always let it overtake you after a hard chase, and in no other way."

"I wish I had your sanguine temperament, cousin, but I have not. I am afraid something has happened to Ralph," and her tears flowed afresh.

He applied himself to the task of diverting her mind from the dark forebodings that oppressed her. He finally succeeded, and she became herself again—a sweet, pretty woman, whose smile was all sunshine. They spent two or three hours together in the parlor, and he never exerted himself more assiduously to please any one than he did then. She smiled and jested with him, and seemed happier than at any time since Ralph's disappearance. He left her to go down to the city to put an advertisement in the "Herald," asking for information for Ralph Thornton, and offering a liberal reward for it.

"She will be mine yet—she and all her gold," he muttered, as he boarded the train. "She cannot hold out against the attentions I will pay to her. She will think me more devoted than any other man could ever be, and then I shall win. It may be a year, two years—but the woman and the gold will be worth waiting for. Ah! I have it. His paltry twenty thousand dollars may go to the winds; I will stick where it will hit her hard and touch her pride. I will take one of his letters and practice her signature till I have it perfect, and then write her a letter from Europe, claiming to be married to a pretty girl with whom I eloped. With his name to such a letter in her possession she would marry out of pique, and go on an extended tour in hopes of running across him and his parvenu wife. By George, the thought is an inspiration. That shall be my plan in the future. I have plenty of letters, and so has she. The thing would easily deceive her, and she will fall into the trap without suspecting anything wrong about it."

Down in the city he went to the several prominent newspaper offices, and put in notices of his cousin's mysterious disappearance, offering a liberal reward for information as to his whereabouts. This done, he went around some of his favorite haunts, and spent the day with several boon companions, spending money freely for wine and cigars. At night he returned to Melrose, and reported what he had done, and asserted Adelaide that if he was alive they would surely hear from him in a few days. She was buoyed up with the hope, and eagerly scanned the papers to see if anything was published on the subject. On the fourth day after the appearance of the announcement of Ralph's mysterious disappearance the

following letter appeared in one of the New York papers:

"To the Editor:

"If the fishes have not been too voracious it is quite likely that the body of Ralph Thornton may be found in the river at the foot of Melrose Cliff. It is one of the most convenient places for one to jump off, fall off, or be thrown off on the river. A thorough dragging of the riverbed below the cliff may end in partially clearing up the mystery of his disappearance.

"Nemo."

Cassius Thornton was sitting near a window in the parlor looking over the pages of a morning paper, when that short letter caught his eye. Had a bombshell exploded under his chair, he could not have been more startled than he was. He sprang to his feet, and held the paper at arm's length, glaring at the letter as though each word in it were a talisman.

Thinking that perhaps there was some truth in the announcement in the paper, the river was dragged for Ralph's body, but nothing came of it. Now it was that Cassius commenced his task of forging a letter from Ralph to Adelaide. It took time to do it, Cassius fearing all the time about the announcement by "Nemo." At last it was finished one night, and as he laid aside his pen and prepared to retire there on the wall beside his bed was the picture of the tragedy on the cliff, which lasted only a few seconds and then disappeared. Cassius was horror-struck.

The next day he announced to Adelaide he was going to set out on a search for Ralph, but in reality it was for the Yankee showman. He secured the disguise of an old man and soon discovered the showman was exhibiting at a place called Brandreth, a short distance away. He soon arrived at the town and met Scroggins on the street at a deserted place, accosted him, picked a row with him, and attempted to stab the old showman, but was disarmed and thrown several feet away by the showman, who exhibited marvelous strength for his years.

"Now, old man," said Giles, "you just slide out of this town before I have you pulled in."

Without uttering a word Cassius slunk away, while the showman returned to his room and made pictures of the street scene. That night at the show Cassius was there, and when the time came not only the tragedy on the cliff was shown, but the assassin was suddenly turned into the old man who attacked the showman on the deserted street. Cassius was so worked up that he followed the showman to his hotel and engaged a room also; but to his surprise the next morning the old showman had left before Cassius got up, and it could not be found out where he had gone to. He returned to the city and hired a detective to learn where Scroggins had gone.

Then he found a man named Herman Krupp who was going to Germany and got him to take the forged letter to Adelaide over with him and post it from there. The man consented, and they had a bottle of wine together.

CHAPTER IX.—The Forged Letter.

When they had finished the wine, Cassius Thornton went up to his room, carrying pen, ink

and paper with him. In an hour he returned, bringing a sealed letter with him, addressed to

"Miss Adelaide Thornton,

"Melrose,

"N. Y.

"U. S. A."

which he handed to Herman Krupp, saying:

"If you forget it, old fellow, or make any mistake, you will make a great deal of trouble for me, I assure you."

"I will take great pains to carry out your wishes."

They shook hands and parted, Herman Krupp to go to Europe that afternoon and Cassius Thornton to return to Melrose.

"I think I have fixed that now," he said, as the train bore him swiftly toward Melrose. "Herman will never visit this country again, and therefore can never give it away. She will keep the letter a secret and tear his memory from her heart, and the people will soon forget such a man ever lived. In another year I shall be master of Beechwood Hall and its pretty mistress."

In a very short time he reached Melrose, and hastened to Beechwood Hall, where Adelaide was waiting so anxiously for the news he would bring. She flew to meet him when the servant announced his arrival, and gave him a kiss, a thing she had often done in a cousinly way.

"Tell me, cousin," she said, impatiently, "have you any news for me?"

"Yes, I have, cousin, and it confirms by first surmises."

"What is it—speak, and relieve me of this suspense!"

"I have traced him to one of the European steamers in which he sailed the day after leaving Melrose. The description of him was accurate, and the name—'R. Thornton,' confirmed it."

Adelaide turned white as a sheet and gasped: "What does it—mean?"

"It means that something has compelled him to go across the Atlantic of which we know nothing. He has written to you of that I am sure, but the letter miscarried. There is nothing wrong about Ralph, cousin. He is both honest and true. You will hear from him on the other side."

Adelaide was puzzled. She did not know whether to cry or rejoice. She was glad to know that he lived, but—and she did not know what to think more. Still, while there was life there was hope, and she would wait until she could hear from him again. Weeks passed, and Cousin Cassius Thornton was kinder to her than a brother and as attentive as the most devoted lover. The time drew near when the letter should arrive from Germany, and both looked anxiously for its arrival. At last it came during the absence of Cassius in the village. She instantly recognized the loved handwriting, and tore the letter open. It read as follows:

"Stuttgart, Germany, June 18, 18—,

"My Dear Cousin Adelaide:

"When I left Beechwood Hall I dared not tell you that I was going away forever. I could not face you and own what I can now do with an ocean rolling between us. We had pledged each other our love, since which time I have learned to love another. I could not help it, knowing, as

I did, what a wrong I was doing to you. To save us both unutterable sorrow I concluded it was best to marry Euphemia and go away with her, where you would never hear of us again, and I have done so. To show that it was purely love that impelled me to this course—Euphemia is poor, having nothing but her love to give me—the fortune left me by my uncle Elwood I leave to you, the check for which I inclose in this. Now, farewell, dear cousin. Forgive me and forget me if you can.

"Your cousin, Ralph."

CHAPTER X.—Meeting an Unexpected Face.

Adelaide, white and rigid as marble, read the letter through to the end, and then quietly folded it up, drew a long, hard breath and put it in the pocket of her dress.

"And I loved him so," she muttered to herself. "I would have believed him true above all other men. But it is all over. I shall never think of him again. False—false—false!"

When Cassius came in, he was astonished at her pallid but tearless face. She had not, could not, shed a tear. If she could, it would not have been so hard for her to bear.

"Adelaide! cousin!" he exclaimed. "What is the matter? Tell me, what makes you look so white?"

She took the letter from her pocket, and handed it to him, saying huskily:

"You may know all now," and then left the room.

He looked at the letter, and then at the forged check. He knew them well.

"Ah, it works!" he joyfully exclaimed, in a whisper. "Her pride is touched. She will be mine within a year!"

Pretending furious anger, he sent for her to come into the parlor again. She came in.

"My poor cousin!" he exclaimed, rushing forward and taking her in his arms, "how my heart bleeds for you! Oh, I could never have believed it of Ralph!"

For the first time since reading the letter tears came to her relief, and she wept hysterically on his shoulder.

"Adelaide, I will follow up the villain and challenge him! He shall answer for this with his blood! I will——"

"No—no—no, cousin!" she sobbed, "let him go. He is unselfish and has given up everything for the one he loved. I shall have no words of reproach for him."

"But it is an insult to you."

"No—no—let him go. I will send back his check and wish him joy—but, oh, I did love him so!" and she pressed her hand on her heart as if to still its wild throbbing.

"But he was unworthy of your love, dear cousin," he said. "You should not think of him again, nor suffer the past to affect your heart's happiness in the least. Because one man proves false it does not follow that all men are so."

She buried her face in her hands and wept long and grievously. He conducted her to the door of her apartment, and there left her. She did not leave her room for several days. In the

meantime he had reported to his acquaintances that Ralph Thornton had been heard from in Europe—that his former letter announcing his departure had miscarried. The explanation was satisfactory to everybody in Melrose, and no more questions were asked about him.

* * * * * * *

When Adelaide Thornton reappeared in the parlors of Beechwood Hall, she was a changed woman. She was pale and beautiful, but there was a distrustful light in her brown eyes, and a hardness in her laugh that plainly told that her heart was not in it.

"Time will heal the wound," Cassius whispered to himself, "and I can afford to wait. She will give me the check to send back to him, and I will see that the money goes to my credit in another bank. Yes, I can wait—I can wait."

True to his surmise, Adelaide came to him with a letter addressed: "Ralph Thornton, Stuttgart, Germany," and said:

"Cousin, I herein send back Ralph's check, with congratulations. I don't know anything about foreign postage. Will you please mail it for me?"

"Yes, of course I will, but I would like to wring the rascal's nose for him."

"Never mind. Please never mention his name to me again; I will have everything in his room forwarded to him at once."

He went to post the letter. But instead he opened it, took out the check, and read it through.

When he returned he reported the letter mailed, and there they dropped any further allusion to the subject. The next day two large trunks containing all the personal effects of Ralph were sent to New York to be sent across to Germany.

"Now the siege will commence," said Cassius, in his heart, "and I will win—I must win. Gold I must have."

That night, near the hour of eleven, he retired to his room. As he entered he was horrified at finding the picture of the cliff tragedy on the wall. He started back with a sudden cry, and the next moment it had disappeared, leaving him in total darkness.

"My God, how that startled me!" he exclaimed. "Will I never get over this nervousness? A sudden thought of that scene seems to bring it before my eyes like a living picture on the wall of my room."

There was no sleep for him that night. That scene haunted him through all the long hours, and not until daylight did he succeed in inducing sleep within his reach. Thus days, weeks and months passed, and still that haunting specter appeared before him at the very times when he was least expecting it. During one of his customary visits to the city he remained over a day with some boon companions. On that evening he visited a place of amusement where wine was sold in the auditory. He drank deeply without paying any particular attention to the performance on the stage. Suddenly he saw a man standing in front of him, and looking up beheld the veritable Giles Scoggins staring him full in the face.

In spite of his natural courage, his heart sank like lead in his bosom, and he seemed helpless to do more. His eyes glared and a guilty conscience made him shrink as though the Yankee

were a royal Bengal tiger about to spring upon him. Scoggins smiled and reached forth his hand and grasped his, which had fallen limp and lifeless by his side, and pressed it in a vise-like grip.

CHAPTER XI.—Giles Scroggins Again.

When Scoggins reached forth his hands towards Charles Thornton, the latter shrank for a moment; but in another instant he grew perfectly desperate, and quickly placed his hand on his revolver, resolved to resist arrest and slay his accuser at one blow. He believed that the eccentric Yankee intended to arrest him, and in his desperation knew no other way to escape him. But to his surprise, Scroggins grasped his arm with a hearty:

"How do you do, Mr. Thornton? I haln't seen you since you was up at Brandreth."

"Oh—ah—is it you, Scoggins?" he replied, breathing a sigh of relief. "I—I was not up at Brandreth."

"Oh, I guess you hev forgot it," said Giles, good-naturedly. "You was thar, you know, an' saw my show."

"Oh, yes, I remember now. You held forth in the school-house," returned Cassius. "But what are you doing down here in New York City?"

"I come down every month to put a few dimes in the bank," said Giles. "It won't do, you know, to carry too many dimes about with you in the country. You know a chap tried to stick me in the back at Melrose Branch one night, an' left his blamed knife a-stickin' in my pack."

"Yes—yes, you told me about that," said Cassius, anxious to drop that part of the conversation. "Did you have a successful trip through the country after leaving Brandreth?"

"Yes; I scooped in lots of them little towns along the river," he answered, "an' had oceans of fun. That 'ere picture of Melrose Cliff got 'em every time. Best picture I ever made."

Cassius bit his lip with spasmodic energy in his effort to control his features while listening to him, above all other men, on that fearful subject, and made no remark upon it.

"You recall that picture, don't you, eh?" Giles asked.

"What kind of a picture was it?" asked one of Cassius friends, who had been patiently waiting for him to introduce the awkward Yankee.

"Oh, it was a darlin'!" exclaimed Giles, with real enthusiasm in his voice. "It was this way, you see——"

"There—the curtain is going up!" said Thornton, quickly interrupting him. "Keep quiet. I want to hear the play."

Giles quietly turned towards the stage and seemed to be as much interested as any other man in the audience. But instead of watching the performance, Thornton was furtively watching Scroggins. The imperturbable Yankee was a tremendous enigma to him. He was turning up at most unexpected times, and dashing all his pleasures into the cesspool of distressing suspense. The play went on, and all conversation was hushed till the curtain dropped again.

"Now let's have a drink," said Cassius, quickly. "What'll you have, gentlemen?"

"I'll have a straight snifter of whisky," said Giles.

The other named their drinks and the order was given. The drinks were brought, and, as they were about to pledge each other, the curtain went up again.

"Hallo!" exclaimed Thornton, "that's what I call a short stop. They don't give a fellow time to drink."

The lights were turned down to a dim twilight.

"We can drink as well in the dark as in the light," said Thornton. "Here's to long and merry lives for all of us."

"That's it!" said Giles, turning up the glass and drinking its contents.

Just as he placed his glass to his lips a large round circle of light appeared on the stage, plainly outlined against a white canvas. In an instant the circle was filled with a picture—the picture of the Melrose Cliff tragedy. Thornton's eye caught it just as he had half emptied his glass. He gave a start, a gasp, and with a savage oath wheeled and hurled his glass at Scroggins' head. Instead of striking his head it hit the glass he held to his lips, and the two glasses shattered into a score of pieces and fell on the floor at his feet.

"Hallo!" exclaimed Giles. "What's that?"

In an instant Cassius recollected himself and stood still as a statue, gazing straight at Scroggins, who was innocently looking up at the ceiling, as if to see whence came the glass that had fallen so suddenly upon his. The other two friends had been so absorbed in the picture that they did not see him throw the glass, though they heard the crash.

"How did it happen?" they both asked in whispers.

"Hanged if I know," replied Giles.

Thornton said not a word, but stood there watching Scroggins, ready to apologize or deny the assault if charged, just as circumstances would permit. Soon the curtain came down and the lights were turned on again. Thornton breathed free, and sank back in his seat as though bored by the whole performance.

"How came this house with that picture?" he hoarsely asked of Giles.

"Sold it to 'em," was the laconic reply of the Yankee.

"For how much?"

"That's bizness," was the short answer.

"Beg your pardon, but you know I bought it once."

"No—you bought one like it."

"All the same though."

"No. I sell you a house and build me another one just like it. Would you claim both houses?"

"No; but——"

"Exactly. I sold you a picter and made some more just like it. Do you want the exclusive right forever an' amen to that picter, an' no more like it?"

"Yes; for how much?"

"Ten thousand dollars!"

Thornton's eyes flashed indignantly. He loved gold too well to even think of parting with such a sum, even to purchase immunity from the haunting specter of his crime.

"I won't give it!"

"Then you won't get it."

Both men straightened themselves up in their seats and gazed intently at the play.

"Is he trying to blackmail me?" Cassius Thornton asked himself a dozen times in as many minutes. "Oh, if I only knew how much he knows!"

The play ended, and the two friends accompanied Thornton to his hotel, and Scroggins went—they knew not where.

CHAPTER XII.—The Apparition.

Early the next day Cassius returned to Melrose, looking older by ten years, almost, than when he left there three days before. The gold he had played so heavily for was fast becoming a curse to him. He had calculated that in the pleasures which gold could buy he could forget the crime that made him rich. But the head that wears a crown has never the rest and ease of that of the honest workingman.

His last meeting with the eccentric Giles Scroggins had broken up the quietude of mind into which he had fallen. The vision haunted him day and night. He could not shake it off. It came up at the most unexpected times to accuse and render him a prey to the most disgusting doubts. Since the terrible blow which the discovery of Ralph Thornton's infidelity and desertion had given her, Adelaide Thornton had kept herself very much secluded. But the public knew the reason why. It was a hard thing to forgive, for she had loved only as a true woman can love. Only her cousin—not of any blood relationship but by adoption—Cassius Thornton, was permitted to show her any attention in public. He grew as devoted, and yet acted solely as a dear brother, as was possible for a lover to become, and she was grateful to him for it. One evening he walked into the parlor before the gas had been lit, and wishing to see a certain piece of music on the piano, he struck a match and lit the gas. When the light flooded the room, he turned around to approach the piano, when a tall, manly form confronted him. Looking up, he found himself face to face with—Ralph Thornton! With a yell of terror he dashed through the window nearest to where he was standing, taking the whole glass with him. The glass made a tremendous crash, and the thousand pieces rattled like hailstone on the ground underneath. The yell and the crash alarmed the servants, who ran out to see the cause. They found him bleeding and half fainting.

"Carry me to my room, Dick," he groaned, and his stout body-servant took him up in his arms and carried him upstairs to his own apartment.

"How did it happen, sir?" Dick asked, in great eagerness.

"I had a fainting attack," he said, "and falling against the window broke the glass and fell through."

"You are cut in a dozen places, sir," said Dick. "Shall I send for the doctor?"

"Yes, I think you had better—I am badly hurt; but don't leave me, Dick."

"No, sir, I will not," and calling another servant, he despatched him for the family phy-

sician, and then returned to the bedside of his master.

"Dick," he said, when they were alone together a few minutes, "if I should go to sleep to-night, don't turn off the gas; let it burn all night."

"No, sir; it shall be as you desire," replied the faithful servant, trying to examine some of the cuts about his face, head and neck.

In a short time the physician arrived and proceeded to bandage the wounds. When the work was done he said:

"Now tell me how this thing happened."

Dick explained it to him, and he asked again:

"How is it that I find nervous excitement and great mental prostration?"

"Go through that window as I did, doctor," said Cassius, taking the answer from Dick, "and I think your nerves would show some excitement, too."

"Yes—yes, perhaps it would. You want to keep quiet, and get all the sleep you can," said the doctor. "I will call again in the morning," and with that he left.

"Where is your mistress?" Cassius asked, as a servant entered the room to carry out the basin into which the blood-stains had been washed.

"In her room, sir. She wants you to excuse her to-night, as she is in such a state of excitement that she can't leave her room."

The answer of the servant soothed him to a great extent, as he believed that her excitement was on his account.

"Tell her I am dangerously hurt," he said, "and am feeling better now."

The maid left the room, and then Dick started to follow.

"Dick," he called, "if you will sit up and sleep in that old arm-chair, I will give you extra pay."

Dick looked at him in profound astonishment, and thought that he was losing his senses.

"Will you do it?" Cassius asked, seeing him hesitate.

"Yes, sir, if you wish it," he replied.

"I do wish it. Don't leave me alone during the whole night."

Dick dropped into the chair, and gazed fixedly on the face of his young master, who lay there, not daring to close his eyes. About midnight Dick fell asleep in his chair, leaving the gas burning brilliantly; he snored incessantly, and Cassius inwardly felt grateful for the fact. At sunrise Cassius called to him to hand him a drink of water. He sprang up, rubbed his eyes, and glared around the room as though he didn't know where he was.

"Bring me a glass of water, Dick," Cassius said, repeating his order; "I am very thirsty."

"Yes, sir. I—I didn't know where I was at first," and he hastened to pour him a glass of water.

As Dick approached the bedside he suddenly halted, and stared blankly at his young master.

"What's the matter, Dick?"

"Is—it—you, sir?" Dick asked, in trembling hesitation.

"Yes, of course it is. What's the matter with you this morning?"

"There's nothing the matter with me, sir," re-

plied Dick; "but you, sir, what's the matter with you? You don't look——"

"I am just simply dry; give me some water," and reaching forth, he took the glass out of Dick's hand and drained it of its contents.

Dick continued to stare at him as though some strange fascination held him spellbound. But Cassius appeared as though utterly unconscious of the cause of it.

"Did you dye your hair white, sir?" Dick finally asked.

"Why, no; what do you mean?"

"Your hair is as white as snow, sir," said Dick, his eyes opening wider every moment.

Cassius Thornton bounded out of bed with the spring of a tiger, and stood before the mirror. He gazed, with horror depicted on every feature of the face, at the reflection before him, for there he stood with his hair silvered as though he were a man of four score years of age instead of in his twenties.

"It is the curse of gold!" he gasped, staring wildly at his reflection. "It is the curse of gold!" and his voice grew harsh and bitter in tone as he repeated the words. "It has come—come to stay. I will bear it and live for vengeance. He shall not escape the reward for this!" and turning around he saw Dick gazing and listening to all his utterances. He suddenly halted and tried to remember what he had said.

"Dick," he said, "you see what mental work will do for a man. For weeks I have been racking my brain for a plan by which I can invest my money and thus grow richer than all other men. It was too much for me. I fainted, fell through a window, cut myself badly and lost a large quantity of blood. I am turned white in a single night."

Dick gazed at him in sympathetic astonishment, little dreaming that the explanation was for himself and the household servants. He finally went downstairs and reported the strange phenomenon to all the household. Everybody seemed to be surprised—astounded, in fact, and wanted to see the white head that only the day before was as black as the raven's wing. Cassius dressed himself after the physician had paid another visit, and went down into the parlor to see Adelaide Thornton.

CHAPTER XIII.—The Effect of Fear.

He had not been in the parlor more than ten minutes ere Adelaide came in, looking as radiant as when Ralph last kissed her. The old dimpled smile was on her face again, and she was the bright, joyous maiden of the good old days before Elwood Thornton was gathered to his fathers. He was at a loss to know to what to attribute the great change that had come over her.

"Why, Cousin Cassius!" she exclaimed. "You look like an old—old man! How in the world did it happen?"

"It is all owing to the shock of that fall through the window," he said. "I have heard of such things, but never knew of a case till now."

"I am so sorry. But you can have your hair dyed, you know."

"Yes, I suppose I can, but I don't know that I

will. Gray hairs always command respect, they say."

"Yes, on old heads; but a black mustache is poor company for a white head."

Cassius looked into the full length mirror at the end of the room, and for the first time noticed the strange contrast between his hair and mustache.

"Yes, you are right," he said, sadly. "I must either dye my hair or cut off my mustache."

She laughed a low, sweet, silvered laugh, and said:

"You will dye early, then. 'Whom the gods love die young,' you know."

He looked at her in dumfounded amazement. Was it the woman who had shed tears of sorrow on his bosom that was laughing and punning over his misfortune? He could scarcely believe his eyes. Did he not know that Ralph Thornton had fallen over a precipice over one hundred feet high, with a dagger sticking in him, he would have thought that he had returned and revealed himself to his pretty cousin. But he knew that was an utter impossibility.

"Yes, I shall die young," he said, after a pause; "but what makes such a change in you, dear cousin? Yesterday you were sad and moping drearily about the house. To-day you are more like your old self."

A low, silvery laugh again greeted him, making as sweet vocal music as he ever wanted to hear, and she answered:

"When Dick told me of your misfortune, dear cousin, I was shocked. I knew you would feel badly over it, and so resolved to be my old self again."

"You dear, darling, good cousin!" he exclaimed, darting forward and clasping her in his arms. "You are a jewel, Adelaide—a diamond, pure and simple. What other woman would do as you have done?" and he kissed her so passionately that she was forced to resist and free herself from his grasp.

"I shall never dye my hair now," he said, "for you will not think less of me on account of it. I shall be proud of it from this time forth," and his heart fluttered, as with a triumphant joy, for he believed that she was even then ready to fall into his arms and own her love for him.

She turned to her apartment, and he was left alone in the parlor near the very spot where he had seen the ghost of Ralph the evening before. He looked around as if half fearful of meeting the terrible apparition again, and suddenly left the room, going back to his own apartment.

"My God!" he muttered, "if it were not for meeting his apparition stalking about through this house, my triumph would be complete. She loves me and is ready to become mine the moment I ask her. When I am master of Beechwood Hall I will remove to the city and leave it to his unrestful spirit, for ghosts can never be driven from a place, neither can people live with them. Ugh! I shall never get over the shock of that meeting! He appeared as plainly as I ever saw him in natural life."

It soon became noised about Melrose that Cassius Thornton had met with a serious accident, got badly cut with broken glass, and turned gray in a single night. Of course many of his friends called to see about it, and the truth soon became

known. As long as third parties were present he had no fears of a visit from the ghost of his murdered cousin, so he managed to keep some one of his many friends by his side until the several wounds were healed up. Then he went out and all the good people of Melrose regarded him as a wonderful freak of nature. Adelaide seemed as happy as in the old days, making as merry over his gray head as if they were children together.

"People will think you are my grandfather, you know," she said, one day, as they started out for a stroll through the lawn in front of the Hall. "By the way, there was a big, brawny Yankee here looking for you this morning; he said his name was Scroggins, and that he was a friend of yours. How in the world did you pick up such an associate?"

Cassius stopped and stared at her. His face grew as white as his hair, and he leaned against a tree for support.

"Why, what is the matter, cousin?" Adelaide exclaimed.

"I am not feeling very well," Cassius answered. "What did the fellow have to say?"

"Oh, he said he merely called to pay a friendly visit."

Cassius shortly left her and went to his room, where he strode up and down, all the time calling down maledictions upon the showman.

That night he strolled out into the starlight and approached a vine covered summer house. But as he drew near he saw a form enter the summer house and on creeping up silently he heard two people whispering. He entered the summer house and lit a match. There was the form of a man standing in the centre bolt upright and pointing his finger at the newcomer, and the face was that of Ralph Thornton, his murdered cousin. Cassius gave one look and fled—fled away from Beechwood Hall down into the village of Melrose. He went to the hotel and registered. Next morning he went down to the breakfast room to run into Giles Scroggins. The showman attempted to shake hands with him. But Cassius pushed him away with the remark:

"Excuse me. I'm in a hurry," and darted away. Returning to the Hall he met Adelaide at the breakfast table. After saying he had been called away all night she soon left the table, leaving him to finish alone.

CHAPTER XIV.—"Die as the Fool Dieth!"

On finishing his morning meal, Cassius Thornton strolled out of the house and wended his way across the grounds toward the carriage gate, determined on a walk down into the village. But he had not quite reached the gate ere he saw the tall, angular Yankee showman going leisurely along the path that led up the wooded banks of the river in the direction of Melrose Cliff.

"Ha! Going for a morning stroll, are you? By my soul—if I have one—I will follow you and see if I cannot send you still further—so far that you will never return again!"

And wheeling suddenly around he retraced his steps, entered the house, flew up the broad stair-

way three steps at a bound, dashed into his room, and snatched his revolver and a murderous-looking knife from their places of concealment in his trunk.

He left the house again, this time going as though some special business urged him to hasten. Out of the gate he went, and looking around, as if to see if any one was watching him, he wheeled to the left and proceeded along the path that led through the woods to the cliff. Soon he was concealed from view in the heavy foliage of the trees. He hastened forward, almost at a run, so anxious was he to get the intrepid Yankee in sight once more. But run as fast as he would he failed to catch up with him, and he soon reached the famous cliff, which he had not visited since the day he hurled Ralph Thornton from it to the boiling river below.

Glancing around in every direction he almost prayed for a glimpse of his intended victim. He walked to the edge of the precipice and looked out over the great river, and up and down the banks. Suddenly he looked down almost under the cliff itself, and saw the object of his eager search sitting under a clump of bushes reading a book.

"Ah! there he is! Oh, for a rifle to pierce his brain with a bullet. He may be armed, but I will go down there and fight him to death. I'll end this haunting terror now and forever."

He ran back some two hundred yards to where a narrow path diverged down to the water's edge at the foot of the cliff, into which he turned, revolver in hand, and pushed forward like a madman. Over rough and dangerous places he ran with cat-like agility, until at last he was close to the object of his hate. Giles Scroggins heard him coming. He knew not who it was—did not suspect who it was—but he arose to his feet and looked up the path to see. Suddenly Cassius Thornton appeared through the bushes and glared at him in cruel triumph.

"Ah!" exclaimed Cassius, "I have you at last! You have lived long enough, Giles Scroggins. Die as the fool dieth!" and with that he raised the revolver and fired.

Scroggins seemed utterly dazed for a moment, and stood like a statue, gazing at the would-be assassin. But seeing his first shot had not taken effect, Thornton quickly advanced as if to make sure of his aim the next time and fired again. Scroggins sprang up and fell backwards into the water, only two feet below, and disappeared from sight in the boiling current. Cassius ran forwards to the spot and closely watched for his reappearance on the surface.

One—two—three—five minutes passed, and the current of the mighty river moved seaward as though unconscious of the crime it was concealing from the world.

"Thank God he is gone!" exclaimed the murderer, in triumph. "I am free! The curse of my life is removed. Only the curse of gold remains. I have slain one and will embrace the other. Oh, bright, happy days!"

The consciousness that the haunting Yankee showman was no more made him feel as lively as a wild schoolboy, and he bounded up the path that led to the cliff again as light as a feather. When he reached the upper path he almost danced a jig in his joy at having gotten rid of

his enemy. He walked briskly back toward the village, and made his way down to the Melrose House, where he met several friends; drank wine, and was more like his former self than he had been for months.

He spent the entire day in the village, feeling so happy over the riddance of his pest that he drank too deeply, and remained with a friend all night. The next day he called on Adelaide and informed her that he was going down to the city for a few days. She was pleasant and vivacious, telling him to be a good boy and be back in time for the wedding.

"You know," she said, archly, "that when I am Mrs. Thornton I will have something to say about the coming and going of my husband."

"Oh, yes, of course, and my greatest happiness shall be in the deferring to your wishes."

"That's what all young men say before marriage," she said, laughing merrily. "Of course, you will soon forget all such promises."

"Never—I will never forget what is due you, dearest," and he tried to kiss her, but she resisted him and went away, saying:

"I will be back soon, darling, so enjoy yourself as much as you can till I come back."

"Yes, and you do the same, for when I marry you, you will lose your liberty!"

CHAPTER XV.—The Work of the Invisible Artist.

Cassius went to the city and found that it would be more pleasant to have his hair dyed its original color again, as the first man he called upon was so demonstratively astounded that it became really painful to him.

"By George, old fellow!" exclaimed his friend, "You must have been awfully scared to have turned white in that way."

"Well, I must confess that it was a pretty severe fright," he said. "But if you won't mention it to any of the boys, I will have it dyed black again."

"Well, I will promise you that," said the friend, and the two shook hands over the bargain.

Cassius went to a barber and had his hair dyed a glossy black again, which made him look more like his former self. Then he recommended a series of wild debaucheries with his boon companions, turning day into night, and night into day, having used his credit to borrow a large sum of money from a friend. Weeks passed and still his free enjoyment of a new lease of life went on. The Yankee showman no longer annoyed him by his presence, queer remarks and terrifying pictures; neither did the accusing specter of Ralph Thornton disturb him.

He went to bed at a late hour, and slept late. Nothing disturbed his slumbers now. Conscience he had none, and therefore one crime or a dozen made no difference with him. One evening a friend asked him:

"Thornton, what has become of that queer Yankee showman who claimed acquaintance with you one night in the theater?"

The question startled him as though something had suddenly stung him, and he answered:

"I don't know. Why do you ask?"

"Oh, I was thinking what a queer character he was, and how much fun we could have with him if we had him here now."

"Ah, yes; certainly. He was an odd character. But I never took any fancy to him. I really could not appreciate his social qualities or adamant cheek."

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed the other. "I always admire the sublime in everything."

"Well, so do I, generally," replied Thornton, "but that fellow was perfectly nauseating to me. Had the light of his sublimity shone upon anyone else but me I would probably admire him as much as you do."

"You don't know where he is?" his friend asked again, and Cassius eyed him suspiciously, a vague fear tugging at his heart.

"No. Have you heard anything of him?"

"No; I only wish I knew," said the friend, languidly; "I sometimes think he was quite a genius with his oddities," and the remarks of the boozy friend annoyed Cassius so much that he called for drinks in order to put a stop to them.

One morning he awoke and discovered that he had but a small sum of money left of the amount he had borrowed to celebrate his emancipation from the ghost of Ralph and the accusing picture of the tragedy.

That morning he took but one drink, just to steady his nerves, and then went into a barber's shop, where he took a bath, a shampoo, a shave, and had his hair touched up again. Looking in the mirror, he saw the old face of former days, when he was a fashionable young man about town, save the extra coloring wine and late suppers had given him.

"Confound it!" he growled, as he inspected his reflection with the eye of a connoisseur. "That invisible artist has been painting my nose a little. I shall have to wait a few days and let it fade. I don't think it has any fast colors in it yet," and lighting a cigar, he strode out of the tontorial saloon and walked down the street like a young millionaire who has been bored with life.

Several days after, thinking the paint of the invisible artist had sufficiently worn off his nose, he concluded to return to Beechwood and surprise the inmates. Accordingly he took the train late in the afternoon, and reached the village of Melrose just as a lovely twilight had settled over it. Entering the little park that surrounded the elegant mansion, he strolled leisurely up the pebbled walk to the broad veranda. Two young ladies were sitting on the steps, one of whom arose and entered the house when he entered the gate. But she returned before he was halfway between the gate and the house, accompanied by Adelaide, her face radiant with smiles.

"Why, Cousin Cassius!" exclaimed the lovely mistress of Beechwood, running gracefully forward to meet him. "How you have surprised us! What in the world have you been doing to your hair? Mercy on me! if the man hasn't dyed it as black as jet!"

"Of course I have, dear cousin," he replied, taking both her hands in his and giving her an affectionate look. "Now tell me, darling, don't you like my looks?"

"Oh, you are the same old saucy thing you always were," she replied. "But you deserve a

severe punishment for staying away from Beechwood so long. And you never wrote me a line in three whole weeks. Oh, you are a model, gallant lover indeed!"

He winced under the thrust and said:

"I plead guilty; but I knew that you knew where I was all the time: I have been very busy, you know."

"Ah, cousin, you won't let well enough alone. The curse of gold will always haunt you, because you are always so eager to add more of it to your wealth. Happiness and peace of mind will never be your lot in life unless you try to be more contented than you are. If you made a million you would want to make another and another, until at last you would be angry because you were not richer than the Rothschilds."

By this time they had reached the veranda where the two young ladies were sitting. They were two Melrose maidens whom he knew, and he greeted them heartily as he ran up the steps to go to his room. Running up the stairs he reached the first landing, and was about to run up the second section when he met a man coming down as noiselessly as a cat, his feet seeming to make no impression on the carpet. Certainly no sound of footsteps of his were heard. Wondering who it could be, as Adelaide had said nothing of any other gentleman being in the house, he looked up at his face.

Horrors of horrors, it was the face of his murdered cousin, Ralph Thornton! Pale, rigid, and marble-like, the apparition stared him full in the face. Cassius leaned heavily back against the wall and held his breath. The apparition slowly raised his right hand and glided toward him. With an unearthly shriek Cassius bounded away, clearing the stairs at two leaps, falling at the bottom and rolling clear out on the veranda.

CHAPTER XVI.—Naming the Day.

Of course Adelaide and her two lady companions screamed in full chorus as Cassius came yelling and rolling heels over head out on the veranda. Cassius scrambled to his feet white as a ghost, bruised from head to foot, and stammered:

"Oh, Lord!"

"What in the world is the matter, cousin?" cried Adelaide, running up to him and clutching his arm. "Oh, tell me what it is! What is it, for heaven's sake?"

"This house is haunted!" he gasped.

"Oh, mercy!" chorused all three at once.

"Haunted! I saw his ghost!"

"Whose ghost?" Adelaide asked, as all the servants came running out of the house.

"His—Ralph's—and——"

"Hush—oh—don't let the servants hear you! I couldn't keep one in the house to-night if they heard you," and she quieted him, sent the servants back to their quarters and then asked him:

"Are you hurt, cousin?"

"Oh, I don't know," he said. "I may be bruised a little, but I don't mind that. I tell you the house is haunted. It is not the first time I have met his ghost inside there."

"Oh, you must be laboring under a strange delusion, cousin," said Adelaide. "Come into the parlor and sit down. Cousin Ralph is not dead, you know, hence it could not be his spirit you saw. I have not heard any strange noises, nor seen any visions of ghosts in the house. You must be mistaken, or else be laboring under a delusion."

Cassius began to feel ashamed of himself for having given himself away. It was not considered manly to be afraid of supernatural appearances.

At ten o'clock he left her and started upstairs to his room again, his hand on his revolver, as though that weapon could avail him in a meeting with denizens of the spirit world. But he saw nothing to alarm him on the stairs, so he entered his room, which he found just as he had left it three weeks before. The familiar objects in the room made him more cheerful, and he proceeded to prepare for a night of rest.

"Beechwood will always be haunted by that apparition," he muttered, "though it is strange no one else here has seen it but me. It may be that it has begun to follow me wherever I go. I thought the fear of that Yankee showman's knowledge of something might have caused me to imagine I saw it. But now I know better; I was feeling safe again. Yes, she spoke more truth than she knew when she mentioned the curse of gold. It is already upon me, and I may as well make up my mind to bear it without being any more surprised at what visions I may see in the future."

He threw himself on the bed and tried in vain to sleep. He bitterly repented leaving New York, and vowed that he would implore Adelaide on the next morning to appoint the day for their marriage, and then go back to the city till the day of the ceremony. Toward daylight he dropped into an uneasy, restless slumber, from which he did not awaken until nearly noon the next day. An elegant breakfast awaited him, to which he did ample justice, though he felt very sore from the tumble down the stairs the night before. Adelaide met him in the parlor and asked him to walk with her in the park, to which he gladly consented, gallantly tendering his arm when they had descended from the veranda.

"Dearest," he said, tenderly, as they walked under the towering elm and beechwood trees, "I must ask you to name the day now when you will become mine. I have waited long enough now, and you will agree with me that we will be happier married than remaining bound by the ties of an engagement."

"Why be in such haste, cousin?" she asked.

"I am not in haste, dearest," he replied, "though I am all eagerness to call you mine and know that nothing but death can separate us."

"Oh, I forgive you!" she exclaimed, laughing and blushing at the same time. "I will set this day two weeks. Will that be long enough?"

"Bless you, my darling!" he fervidly exclaimed. "I did not hope for such happiness so soon."

"This day two weeks then I will voluntarily give up all my freedom and become Mrs. Thornton," she added.

"No—no—not give up any freedom!" he said, seizing her hand and pressing it to his lips, "but

to bless one whose life will be devoted to giving you more freedom—the freedom of ruling as queen in one devoted heart which adores you, which would shed its blood for you, and——”

“Ugh! Off! Save me!” he gasped, and the next moment he broke away and fled from her side like a wild maniac, leaving her alone among a cluster of rose bushes, gazing after his rapidly retreating form as he dashed forward toward the house.

“Why, what can be the matter?” exclaimed Adelaide. “He must have seen another apparition.”

One night as he was sitting in his chair in the parlor a hand touched his shoulder and a sepulchral voice said:

“Follow me!”

With a shriek he sprang up and plunged through the window; alighting on his feet he sped out the gate and straight to the depot. He reached it just as a train was pulling out. Not looking what track he was on he boarded a train going West instead of to New York. Going to the next stop he got off and took a train going East to New York. Going to a hotel, he took a drink and then went to a room, where he wrote a letter to Adelaide Thornton at Beechwood Hall.

CHAPTER XVII.—Desperation—The Midnight Vision.

The letter Cassius wrote to the heiress of Beechwood Hall was full of affection and explanations of his extraordinary conduct in leaving Melrose as he did. She well understood why he had left his hat and cane, and knew that another vision of some supposed disembodied spirit had appeared to him after she left the room. He promised to write to her every day till the time for the wedding came, when he would hasten to her side never to leave her again.

“But we cannot live at Beechwood, darling,” he continued; “there can be no happiness where the ghosts of the dead peer at you from every corner, and meet you among the rose bushes. No—no, rather let us go where happiness and joy supreme will be ours. Still, your will shall be my law. If you insist on it I will sacrifice my dislike of dead men’s ghosts and try to cultivate their friendship. But I am sure you will never require that sacrifice at my hands. The reason why they never annoy you is, I am told, your innocence and purity is proof against them.”

Such was his letter, and as she read it her face was white and rigid, and there was a strange light in her eyes, but whether of love or triumph the sequel will tell. She did not write in reply to that letter, but a few days later wrote that everything at Beechwood Hall was moving along at the old humdrum rate; that no ghosts had been seen by anybody on the place since he left, and hoped he would not fail to be on hand at the village church at the day and hour appointed.

“Of course I will be there,” he muttered, and smiled as he folded up the letter and put it in his pocket for safe keeping. I would be a fool not to be there. A million dollar bride will be there, and I wouldn’t fail for my good right hand.

Oh, no! I shall start for Europe that day with as lovely a bride as ever wedded a husband. But Beechwood must go to the highest bidder. Mrs. Cassius Thornton will have no use for it as a residence.”

He remained at the hotel, thinking over the past, and wondering if the ghosts of Thornton and Scroggins would continue to follow him outside of Melrose.

“If they do,” he muttered, “I will have to face them boldly and defy them. They cannot accuse me. They cannot come into court and fasten the crime of their taking off on me. They cannot summon witnesses and prove my guilt. Then why should I fear to face them? Hang the ghosts! Let ’em do their worst. I defy them!”

“You dare not go back to Beechwood!” spoke a hollow voice behind him.

He sprang to his feet and glared around, half expecting to face one of those horrible specters again. But no one was there. Not a living soul was in the room save himself.

“My God!” he gasped, dropping into his chair again. “How that frightened me! Who was it? What was it? I am sure I heard a voice, and its words were true! I dare not go back to Beechwood; I dare not face my victims. My nerves ran away with my head. What shall I do? Can I never get rid of this unmanly fear? If not, I will become a mere wreck in a very few years. I cannot stand this strain upon my mind. Are they trying to drive me to suicide? When that one said: ‘Come with me,’ the other day, did it mean for me to leap to death to do so? Can I keep my crimes a secret from Adelaide when we are married? I have come near giving myself away several times. Will I not say something some day in my moments of fear that will arouse her suspicions and drive her from me? No matter how well she loved me, she would not live with me while the stain of blood was on my hands.”

Such conflicting thoughts nearly distracted him. He grew old-looking and careworn, notwithstanding his dyed hair and faultless attire. His friends noticed the change, but congratulated him on his approaching marriage with the heiress of Beechwood Hall. It took him several days to get over that voice in his room at the hotel. He finally concluded that it was his own fear and sensitive imagination, and dismissed further thought of it from his mind. But no sooner had he dismissed the thought than another terrifying occurrence completely threw him off his balance and nearly sent him to bed with a fever. He was sleeping in his room one night, when he felt some one touch his face. He sprang up, and saw by a dim light in the room a form like that of Giles Scroggins standing over him.

“Giles—Giles!” he gasped, cold drops of perspiration rolling down his face.

Giles slowly raised his hand, and pointed to the wall on the other side of the bed. He turned and looked. Oh, horror of horrors! There was brilliantly pictured on the white wall the tragedy of Melrose Cliff, and as the victim fell over the precipice, the words:

“You are in my way—die!” rang through the room, and Cassius Thornton shrieked and then swooned.

How long he remained thus he knew not, but

when he awoke he felt both weak and cold, and quite damp from excessive perspiration. When the breakfast hour came, pale and haggard, he arose, but he was so heartsick that he bathed his face and head, and then went back to bed.

CHAPTER XVIII.—The Surprise

One day, about a week after the last visit from the ghosts, Cassius received a short letter from Adelaide Thornton, in these words:

"Dear Cousin: Don't fail to invite one hundred of your personal friends to the wedding. We are all as busy as bees, and I am as happy as the day is long. As ever,

"ADELAIDE."

Of course he lost no time in getting up a handsome card of invitation to be sent to the one hundred personal friends in the city and elsewhere. Three-fourths of them signified their intention to be present at the ceremony. During the next several days preceding the wedding Cassius was too busy in receiving congratulations to think of the curse of the haunting specters which had embittered his life. And when the day of the ceremony came that was to make him both a husband and a millionaire at the same time, he was so elated that the thought of the past never once came up before him. He had engaged a special car for his friends, and as lively a party of young gentlemen of wealth and social standing as were ever grouped together assembled at the depot of the train that was to take them to Melrose. On their arrival at Melrose they repaired to the Melrose House, and took up quarters there till the hour to repair to the church arrived. Tickets to prominent seats in the church were given to his New York friends, at which they were extremely delighted. At last the hour came, and a long line of carriages took the groom's friends to the church, where they were shown seats in the most conspicuous part of the house. Cassius waited in his carriage for the arrival of the bride.

She soon came, accompanied by half a score of pretty bridesmaids, she herself looking perfectly regal in her bridal robes. He met her in the vestibule and bowed with a bounding heart. The mayor of Melrose gave her his arm, and led her into the crowded church to the inspiring strains of a wedding march, followed by Cassius, leaning on the arm of one of his friends. After them came the bridesmaids and their escorts. When they arrived at the altar, where the minister stood to receive them, they halted, and Cassius moved to Adelaide's side, where they stood in mute silence several seconds, waiting for the organ to cease the wedding march. Then the minister proceeded to ask the questions in the ceremony of his church, ending by saying if there were any present who knew any cause why this man and woman should not be joined in the bonds of holy wedlock they should speak now, or forever after hold their peace. At that moment two men quietly arose from the front seat behind the couple, and advanced to the

altar. One of them stepped between Cassius and Adelaide, took the bride's hand in his and said:

"She will marry me, if you please," and gave Cassius a defiant look.

Cassius gave him one glance, and then staggered back as if stricken a terrible blow, gasping:

"Ralph—Thornton!"

As he staggered back he struck against the other man, who caught him around the waist, chuckling dryly:

"Brace up—claim yer bride!"

"Scroggins!" he yelled, springing clear over the altar, and striking against the officiating minister with such force as to nearly floor that dignified personage. As it was he knocked the book out of his hand, and sent his spectacles half-way across the sacred enclosure.

Running up against the pulpit Cassius buried his face in his hands, as if to shut out a horrible vision, and pressed his forehead against the sacred desk, his back to the audience. Of course the audience were amazed—dumfounded. They were so much surprised as to merely rise to their feet and stare—stare in mute silence at the extraordinary scene before them. Only the bride and the two men by her side smiled. Ralph Thornton, whom every one instantly recognized, raised the jeweled hand that nestled in his to his lips and kissed it. A murmur of surprise passed over the audience. Cassius, as if having recovered control of himself, turned to face Adelaide and the audience, expecting to find the haunting specters gone. But the two men boldly faced him. His eyes protruded, and a look of wild horror came into his face, and the next moment a groan escaped him, and he sank to the floor in a death-like swoon.

CHAPTER XIX.—Conclusion.

The moment he sank to the floor several persons among his personal friends sprang forward to his assistance. Someone emptied a pitcher of water in Cassius Thornton's face, and others rubbed his hands and shook him roughly.

"He is dead!" said one, who had hold of his hand. "He has no pulse."

Then they all fell back awe-struck in the presence of death. Pale and trembling, the minister waved his hand to the audience and said:

"Please resume your seats."

Soon a profound silence reigned, and the minister, who knew Ralph Thornton well, stepped forward and asked him for an explanation of his extraordinary conduct.

"I have been engagad to this lady," said Ralph, in a low tone of voice to the minister, "for over two years. My Cousin Cassius made an attempt on my life and believed he had killed me. But I escaped in an almost miraculous manner, recovered from my wounds, and have come to claim my bride."

Just then a man—a well-known Melrose physician—who had remained by the side of Cassius, suddenly exclaimed:

"He is not dead! He has only fainted!" and then a scene of excitement again ensued.

Hundreds sprang to their feet to render assistance, and it was nearly ten minutes ere silence and order was restored, during which time the doctor and a number of his friends carried the unconscious young man out of the church and placed him in a carriage. In the meantime the audience remained in ignorance of the cause of all this terrible business. Again the minister requested silence, and was about to proceed to unite Ralph Thornton and Adelaide as man and wife. One of Cassius' friends sprang to his feet and exclaimed:

"Better wait till we hear from Mr. Cassius Thornton!"

"Sit down!" cried others.

"I won't! I forbid that marriage!"

"On what grounds?" the minister demanded.

"On the ground that she has promised to marry Cassius Thornton," replied the friend.

"Never!" cried Adelaide, her clear, silvery voice resounding through the large church, startling everyone. Ralph Thornton then sprang to the altar and faced the audience, and waved his hand for silence. Everybody sat down and gazed eagerly at him.

"You all know me in Melrose," said Ralph. "I was reared in your midst, as was he who has just been carried out by his friends. I was engaged to Adelaide Thornton, the adopted daughter of my uncle. My cousin loved her also, and to get me out of the way, followed me one afternoon to Melrose cliff, and there stabbed me and hurled me over into the boiling river below. I was rescued by a stranger in a small boat, who carried me on board a vessel that was passing down the river.

"When I came to I was on board the vessel, whose surgeon was by my side. The vessel was on its way to Europe, and I begged to be taken with them, as the surgeon had won my confidence. I gave another name, so was not known. When I recovered in Europe, I came back in disguise, saw Adelaide Thornton and told her all, and together we planned this punishment of the would-be murderer. I now demand to be united to her whom I love with my whole heart."

"Yes—yes—yes!" came from the entire audience, the people arising to their feet and waving handkerchiefs.

The minister then called for silence, and performed the ceremony, pronouncing them man and wife. They were escorted back to Beechwood Hall by every man in the audience, the horses being unhitched and the carriage pulled by the enthusiastic young men, who chered them on the way. At the Hall Ralph explained the connection of Giles Scroggins with the case. He wit-

nessed the attempted murder and made pictures of the scene. When Ralph returned and told Adelaide of the affair, she remembered the picture which had caused Cassius to faint at its first exhibition in Melrose, and told her lover about it. Ralph, in his disguise, hunted the Yankee showman up, revealed himself, and told Scroggins what he had heard. Scroggins then told all he knew, and together they had worked so fearfully on the fears of the guilty man that he believed himself haunted by the ghost of Ralph. In his desperation he tried to kill Scroggins; the showman only saving himself by diving into the river and coming up under a clump of bushes. After that the showman haunted him, causing him to faint several times in various places. On reaching the hotel, Cassius had greatly recovered, and was told that Ralph Thornton had returned, and was being married to Adelaide.

He said nothing, but, on entering his room, he opened his trunk, took out his revolver, and exclaiming: "The curse of gold!" fired against his heart, and fell dead in the presence of a dozen friends.

This news was carried to Beechwood Hall, and for a time a gloom was visible on the faces of all. But it soon wore off. Happiness and joy reigned supreme at the grand old Hall, Adelaide and Ralph contributing to the happiness of all around them. Scroggins made a score of pictures of everything connected with the case, and exhibited them for a week in Melrose, reaping a rich harvest for his pains. Cassius was buried quietly at his cousin's expense, and then affairs at Melrose again moved along in the even tenor of their way; but to this day the old people speak of the man who was "Haunted, and the Curse of Gold."

Next week's issue will contain "A SAWDUST PRINCE; or, THE BOY BAREBACK RIDER."

CONSCIENCE HITS TAX DODGER

City Treasurer Calvin R. Barrett of Brockton, Mass., was surprised when he received a certified check for \$500, drawn on the Bank of Italy in San Francisco, with a request that it be added to the tax budget.

The check was sent by a man who signed "A Friend," and who declared that years ago, when he was in business in Brockton, he was not taxed enough. He urged that acknowledgment be made to the bank whence the check was issued.